Why is Special Education Getting More Expensive?
Blue Ribbon Commission
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What is the current status of students with disabilities? Who are they?
- Students in special education have a significant achievement gap in comparison to their same aged peers.
- Students with disabilities are part of the universal instruction, as much as possible per law, and participate in the Equitable Multi-Level Systems of Supports (MLSS) framework from WI DPI
- Many of them have numerous disability related needs (*Autism, Intellectual, Learning, Behavior disabilities, etc.*)
- Many students with disabilities are also experiencing the effects of trauma, lower socioeconomic status, mental health needs, immigrants, English Learner (EL) needs, and/or from cultural/racial minority groups, etc.

Why are there special education budget issues?
- Historically speaking, the Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Part B Grants to states program has never been fully funded federally to local districts
- Never met the authorized "full-funding" level of 40% of national APPE, per the CRS Report by the Congressional Research Service. *See References below*
- Federal funding has instead been in the range of 18%
- The state has funded an additional percentage to support Special Education for a total of 26% categorical aid
- This left the local school districts to fund approximately 70% of additional cost for Special Education
- High Cost student aid is for expenses over $30,000; several GBAPS students fall barely short of this mark.

What are GBAPS's most significant budget concerns:
- Medically fragile students & students with multiple and/or significant disabilities.
- Students with significant emotional and/or behavioral needs.
- High Incidences of Autism which involve diverse needs that make it challenging to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
- Students may require direct or related services that are costly (*occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech language, nursing, school social worker, school counselor, school psychologist, special transportation, etc.*)
- Such students require increased expensive staffing, special programs, extensive staff professional development to help them to access FAPE in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).
- Assistive Technology: low & high tech options as well as comprehensive communication systems, per Individual Education Plan (IEP).
- Implementing unfunded federal and state initiatives, i.e. *Results Driven Accountability* at the federal level with Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) & *Reading Drives Achievement* at the state level with WI DPI.

Exciting Times for Special Education!
- All those barriers aside, it is exciting times to work in the field of special education!
- There are great initiatives coming from DPI, so we do the best we can with the funding that we receive so that ALL students can be College, Career and Community Ready!

- Unfunded initiative: **Reading Drives Achievement (RDA)** prior to this **Response to Intervention (RtI)**
  - **RDA: Results Driven Accountability:** Federal Level & **Reading Drives Achievement** at our State level.
  - **RDA - Reading Drives Achievement - What does this mean for our work?**
    - GBAPS has implemented a system of intervention for all student with disabilities to close achievement gaps
    - Research-based interventions, implemented to fidelity, with progress monitoring
    - The special education department purchased several research-based interventions and Fastbridge Progress monitoring tool was also purchased to meet this requirement.
    - These interventions are expensive and it is taxing our special education resources, but students are making gains!!!
    - There is a lot of energy and enthusiasm in the schools where I visit teachers and participate in department data digs.
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) - Best Practices for All Students
  - **What does this mean for our work? Why additional costs?**
  - **UDL: Universal Design for Learning** comes out of **CAST** from Harvard and is a research-based set of principles to guide the design of learning environments that are accessible and effective for ALL.
  - General education teachers and special education teachers work together to differentiate education for all learners
    - Requires a high level of professional development, which is costly.
    - Need to educate staff about accommodations, modifications and supports for students with disabilities, which is costly.
    - Co-Teaching/Co-Serving/Team Teaching - Adds additional costs related to ensuring that all student needs are met.
    - Requires collaboration among ALL departments including Teaching & Learning and content teachers, English Learners Teachers and Interpreters, Gifted and Talented Staff, Technology Integrators, and Special Education and Pupil Services Staff to **Co-plan & Co-Serve ALL Students**
    - Preble HS & East HS - Professional Development around best practices & UDL to educate ALL students!

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